

# real2reel

FILM AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER MARCH 2001 VOLUME 13 ISSUE 3 ISSN 0819-6306

## Festival news

- **Tosca** won the top award in the Television–Documentary (The Arts) category at the recent San Francisco International Film Festival.

- Film Australia will have a strong presence at the 14th Singapore International Film Festival (12–28 April), which has selected **Cunnamulla**, **Uncle Chatzkel**, **Steel City**, **Thomson of Arnhem Land**, **Buried Country**, **The Diplomat** and **Winds of Change** (a Film Australia distribution title).

- At the recent Festival Internationale des Programmes Audiovisuels 2001 in Biarritz, **Buried Country** and **Cunnamulla** participated in the market and **Thomson of Arnhem Land** and **The Diplomat** screened in competition.

- The Centre for Australian Cultural Studies in Canberra shortlisted both **Once Were Monks** and **Buried Country** in the Group Category of its National Awards 2000 recognising “an outstanding contribution to Australian culture”.

- Filmmaker Ian Dunlop has been invited to be the guest of honour for the 2001 Beeld Voor Beeld Film Festival in Amsterdam. He will then travel to Göttingen in Germany for a conference celebrating the work of pioneering ethnographic filmmakers.

- **City of Dreams** has been selected to screen at the Créteil Festival de Films de Femmes as part of a tribute to women of the 20th century.

- **Sadness** will participate in the Margaret Mead Travelling Film & Video Festival, the largest showcase for independent cultural documentaries in the USA. **Sadness** is also headed for the 6th International Documentary Film Festival Mix Brazil, the leading forum for documentary productions in Latin America.

- **A Calcutta Christmas** and **Sadness** screened at the New Delhi Film Festival in early February. Calcutta’s director Maree

Delofski, who is in New Delhi for several months, was at the screening.

- **The Diplomat** was the only Australian film to screen at the Berlin International Film Festival in February—director Tom Zubrycki and East Timorese leader José Ramos Horta were there to introduce the film. It was a finalist in the Politics category of the New York Festivals, screened at the Human Rights Watch International Film Festival in San Francisco in January and will screen at their New York festival in June. It has also been invited to Visions du Réel in Switzerland, the Amnesty International Film Festival in The Netherlands and the One World International Film Festival in Prague, instigated by Mary Robinson, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Vaclav Havel, President of the Czech Republic.

- The Santa Barbara International Film Festival, held in March, will screen **Tosca** and **The Diplomat**.

- **Thomson of Arnhem Land** has been invited to screen during a special day on human rights defenders at the North-South Media Festival in Switzerland.

- Director Rod Freedman travelled to New York for the screening of **Uncle Chatzkel** at the New York Jewish Film Festival in January where a message from legendary documentary filmmaker Albert Maysles introduced the film: “**Uncle Chatzkel** is one of the most beautiful films ever. For me it sets a welcome standard for all documentaries and for the media in general; that at long last there is portrayed so good a person doing such good things. It’s enough to bring tears—tears of joy for the survival of the human spirit”. Freedman also attended the New York Festivals award ceremony where the film was a finalist in the History and Society category. Other confirmed screenings for **Uncle Chatzkel** are at the Hartford, Maine and Montreal Jewish Film Festivals.

- Guy Gross received the award for best

music for a documentary for his work on **Uncle Chatzkel** at the AGSC Awards held in December last year.

- Three Centenary of Federation exhibitions include Film Australia films. **Belonging—A Century Celebrated** at the State Library of NSW includes **Cyclone Tracy** and the 1950 classic **Farm School Moulds New Future For Young Migrants**. **Sadness** is in *Federation: Australian Art & Society 1901 to 2001* at the Australian National Gallery, and the Powerhouse Museum will feature the series **Federation** during April school holidays.

## RECENT SALES

Film Australia’s Sales Department has sold **Tosca** to Channel 5 in the UK.

**Thomson of Arnhem Land**, **Taram—A Minangkabua Village**, **City of Dreams** and **Uncle Chatzkel** have been licensed for home video/non-theatrical in the USA.

**Thomson of Arnhem Land** and **Uncle Chatzkel** have also been sold to Shanghai Oriental TV.

Australia’s Odyssey channel (Optus) has ordered 25 hours of programming, including **Cane Toads**, **Rats in the Ranks**, **The Gamblers**, **Under the Hammer**, **Hospital—An Unhealthy Business**, **Lake Pedder**, **Rewind**, **Admission Impossible**, **No Milk No Honey**, **Celluloid Heroes**, **That’s Democracy**, **The Forgotten Force**, **Return to Sandakan**, **Plagued**, **Sugar Slaves** and **A Bird in the Hand** and the Film Australia distribution titles, **Say a Prayer for Me**, **Keen As Mustard** and **The Scheyville Experience**.

**The Fifth Set** has been licensed to Qantas in-flight entertainment for Australia.

**Sadness** has been licensed by IETV in Israel and TVNZ in New Zealand.

**Out of the Shadows** (a Film Australia distribution title) has been licensed to Poland’s Telewizja Polska.

## Pay-TV documentary regulations?

Film Australia’s recent submission to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) advocates the introduction of a legislated expenditure requirement for pay TV documentary channels to increase levels of Australian documentary programming.

In 1999, Senator Richard Alston, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, directed the ABA to conduct an investigation into expenditure

requirements for documentary channels after Federal Parliament passed the *Broadcasting Services Amendment Bill (No 3)*. This required pay television drama channels to spend 10 per cent of their programming budgets on Australian drama.

Minister for the Arts, the Honourable Peter McGauran, suggested that the investigation consider similar requirements for Australian documentary channels.

According to the ABA’s figures in 1998–99, the pay TV channels (Discovery, National Geographic, the History Channel and Odyssey) spent 15.5 per cent of total expenditure on Australian documentaries, 5.6 per cent of that on new programs.

Film Australia’s submission recommends that a minimum expenditure of 20

per cent should apply to pay TV documentary channels and that at least half of that be spent on new programs.

The ABA recently presented the results of its investigation to Senator Alston. The production industry eagerly awaits the outcome.

Film Australia launched **Mabo—The Native Title Revolution CD-ROM** and website [www.MaboNativeTitle.com](http://www.MaboNativeTitle.com) in December. Actor Aaron Pedersen, who narrated part of the CD, and Eddie Mabo’s daughter, Maleta Mabo West were special guests. For the next year, the new National Museum of Australia will include the CD-ROM as part of a permanent exhibition in the Gallery of the First Australians.

## Critics’ Award for Cunnamulla

In February, Dennis O’Rourke’s latest film, **Cunnamulla**, won the Australian Film Critics’ Circle Award for Best Documentary 2000. Two other Film Australia National Interest Program productions, **Tosca** and **The Diplomat** were also nominated for the award.

**Cunnamulla** was produced by Film Australia in association with Camerawork Limited, with the assistance of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Released in Sydney and Canberra cinemas last November by Ronin Films, it is currently screening in Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth and the Gold Coast with a return season planned for Sydney in March. The film will also tour to Birch Carroll & Coyle cinemas in regional Queensland.

In the coming months, **Cunnamulla** will screen at the Australian International Documentary Conference in Perth, Cinéma du Réel in Paris, Visions du Réel in Switzerland, the Dublin International Film Festival and the Singapore International Film Festival where Dennis O’Rourke will also present some of his previous work.



Real2Reel is published quarterly by Film Australia.

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## IN POST-PRODUCTION

**THE MUSIC SCHOOL** (EP: Stefan Moore) Professor Ann Boyd has a contagious passion for music and deeply held principles when it comes to higher education. But after a decade of relentless budget cuts, she is not sure how she—or her university music department—can continue. This new film by Bob Connolly and Robin Anderson is due for completion mid-April. Produced in association with Arundel Productions Pty Ltd, with the assistance of the ABC.

**AUSTRALIAN BIOGRAPHY SERIES 8** (EP: Mark Hamlyn) Producer/director Robin Hughes interviews some of Australia's most intriguing elders in this eighth series of biographies: Diane Cilento, Dame Rachel Cleland, Barbara Holborow, Jack Munday, Bill Harney, Ray Whitrod and Inga Clendinnen.

**TOUR WARS** (EP: Stefan Moore) An eye-opening and often droll journey behind the scenes of Australia's multi-billion dollar tourism industry. Director Julia Redwood and producer Ed Pynchard travelled to destinations across the country to find out what kind of Australia the industry is selling. The four-part series, produced in association with Prospero Productions Pty Ltd with the assistance of the ABC, is in post-production in Perth.

**A COMPASSIONATE RAGE** (EP: Franco di Chiera) Moira Kelly is a Melbourne woman with a passion "to give kids with stuff-all chance in life a fair go" and she goes to extraordinary lengths to do it. Alan Lindsay (producer/director/writer) and Helen Clucas (producer) have locked off the fine-cut and the program is due for delivery late March. Developed with the assistance of the AFC and Film Victoria, it's been produced in association with Vue Pty Ltd and with the assistance of the ABC, which will screen the film later this year, the International Year of the Volunteer.

**BUSH MECHANICS—THE SERIES** (EP: Stefan Moore) Jeni McMahon (producer) and David Batty (co-director with Francis Kelly) are continuing post-production at Film Australia (see story on page 3). The series has been produced in association with Warlpiri Media Association Inc, with the assistance of the ABC.

**WHAT IF...?** (EP: Franco di Chiera) This is a film about youth suicide from a very personal perspective. Writer/director Jessica Douglas-Henry returned to rural Geraldton to document the impact of her brother's death on his community and family. Jessica and producer Mary-Ellen Mullane are currently editing at Film Australia. The program was developed with the assistance of the NSW Film & TV Office and produced in association with Iris Pictures Pty Ltd and SBS Independent.

## IN PRODUCTION

**PLUMPTON HIGH BABIES** (EP: Mark Hamlyn) Plumpton High is the only school in Australia with a program supporting schoolgirl mothers completing their education. This documentary follows a year in the lives of some of these young women. Aviva Ziegler (writer/director) and Julian Russell (writer/producer) began shooting in January.

**WELCOME TO THE WAKS FAMILY** (EP: Franco di Chiera) Barbara Chobocky (writer/producer/director) and Rod Freedman (co-producer) are four months into shooting their film about one of Australia's largest families—mum, dad and 17 children aged 3 to 24 years, all raised within a protective, ultra-orthodox Jewish community. The program is produced in association with Documentary Films Pty Ltd and SBS Independent.

**FORTRESS AUSTRALIA** (EP: Stefan Moore) A new documentary by producer/director Peter Butt and producer Rob McAuley has commenced production. The program uncovers the secret history of Australia's bid to become a nuclear power during the cold war years—a plan that has only recently come to light. Produced with the assistance of the ABC.

## IN PRE-PRODUCTION

**UNsung HEROES** (EP: Mark Hamlyn) Produced in association with CAAMA and Macumba Media Enterprises, this six-part series profiles Aboriginal Australians highly regarded in their communities but largely unknown to the wider public. Writer/director Mitch Torres and co-producer Jeff Bruer made the pilot, **Saltwater Bluesman—Uncle Kiddo Taylor**, with series producer Rod Freedman. Another four episodes are in pre-production, with a sixth episode to be announced shortly.

**Steven Craig.** Craig manages a wholly Aboriginal owned and operated cattle station, which runs without the benefit of government funding. (Producer/director Allan Collins, writer Mitch Torres.)

**Media Nomads—The Thaiday Brothers.** Bill and Mick Thaiday have travelled around Queensland, developing Aboriginal radio stations and sharing their belief in strengthening the Aboriginal sense of identity through media. (Writer/director Donna Ives, producer Rod Freedman.)

**Against the Steam—Naomi Myers.** One of a group which formed the Aboriginal Medical Service in Redfern in 1972, Naomi Myers is highly regarded as an expert on Aboriginal health services. (Writer/director Catriona McKenzie, producer Rod Freedman, co-writer Mitch Torres.)

**Over My Tracks—Evelyn Crawford.** She's worked as a maid, cook, rodeo driver and drover, and is mother to 14 children. Now in her 70s, "Auntie Evelyn" is a leading figure in Aboriginal education. (Writer/director Darlene Johnson, producer Rod Freedman.)

The new four-part series **Bush Mechanics**, which started shooting last July in Yuendumu, is now in the final stages of post-production at Film Australia.

The series is a Film Australia National Interest Program in association with Warlpiri Media Association, and is based on the original half-hour program made in 1999 by the same team: Jeni McMahon as producer and David Batty directing with Francis Kelly.

Combining wacky adventures and car repair techniques with a distinctive brand of humour, the series provides a unique insight into both contemporary and traditional Aboriginal culture.

Producer Jeni McMahon noted that "the leafy environs of Film Australia in Sydney are a long way from the vibrancy of community life and the red dusty roads of the Tanami desert".

"From the outset, there were many unique and challenging aspects to the production," recalls McMahon. "For almost



six months David Batty and I lived in the remote Warlpiri community of Yuendumu, home of Francis Jupurrula Kelly and the Bush Mechanic mob.

"Life in a remote desert community can be challenging in itself, let alone producing and directing a four-part TV series within another culture and language. David's long-standing creative partnership with Francis Kelly, plus our strong relationships within the Warlpiri community, were essential to the success of the production.

"It's been a long haul, both exhausting and exhilarating, maintaining a totally open-door policy towards the production. At times we fed around 15 people three times a day—all out of the small house we occupied for the duration of the production, affectionately known as Bush Mechanic Headquarters. The nightly screening of rushes with a big feed regularly attracted over 20 people. The production office also had a steady stream of visitors, at times up to 30 or 40 people, including an assortment of kids and dogs.

"We decided to start the first stage of post-production on location to allow for dialogue translation, community consultation, cultural protocol and general community involvement. David has always found this to be an integral part of making films in Yuendumu, adding to the energy, charm and ingenuity that pervades the series.

"We transported a non-linear edit suite to Yuendumu. Editor David Nixon often shared his edit suite with up to 25 animated onlookers who would drop in to view the latest cut. As the material was in a language David didn't understand, it was often a bonus to have them there. He

could quickly recognise what cuts worked according to the reaction of the audience.

"We always knew we wanted to capture the unique grungy desert Warlpiri sound. This meant locating and transporting a PA, amplifiers, guitars, mikes, mixers, keyboards, drum kit, and digital recording technology over huge distances and setting up an entire recording studio. Then followed jam sessions that would last well into the small hours of the morning. Music director Bill Davis and music producer and engineer Michael den Elzen often had to power down the operation just to get the Warlpiri musicians to have a break.

"In all, during our time there—amongst floods, fires, men's business, stomach bugs, dust storms, lightning strikes, extreme heat and sorry business—we managed to shoot all four episodes of the series, translate around 40 hours of material and compose and record the entire soundtrack."

**THE BUSH MECHANICS (l to r):** (back row) Steven Morton, Randall Wilson (centre row) Jeni McMahon, David Batty, Francis Kelly, Stefan Moore (front row) Simeon Ross, Errol Nelson



## AS SIMEON SAYS

One of the **Bush Mechanics**, Simeon Jupurrula Ross, has been at Film Australia translating subtitles.

"I have family in Hermannsburg, Papunya, and Yuendumu," explains Ross, "and I speak several Aboriginal languages — Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara, Luritja, Yungkuntjatjara."

Ross was in the first **Bush Mechanics** program and David Batty and Francis Kelly wanted him back for the new series.

"When I was young I used to watch my Uncles in the bush fixing cars," says Ross. "That's how I became a bush mechanic."

He explains: "When I was born my real mum was sick, so my foster mum brought me up. My mother's father was Albert Namatjira, the famous artist. He was my grandmother's boyfriend. I grew up with my foster dad, Jack Jakamarra Ross. He is a very good artist too. When I grew up with my foster father he was telling me stories of the first time he saw white fellas and the first time he ever saw a motor car.

"We used some of Jakamarra's stories in the new series of **Bush Mechanics**. Jakamarra would sing me dreamtime stories and tell me about places where he grew up. This is how I came to know all about my country and Tjurkurpa."